

REMARKS

The pending Office Action addresses and rejects claims 1-31. Applicants appreciate the Examiner's indication that claims 3-5, 10, 12-16, 19, 21, 23, 24, and 26-30 represent allowable subject matter, and would be allowed if amended into independent format to include all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

Amendments to the Claims

Applicants amend claims 1, 4-9, 12-13, 17, 20-23, and 26-27. Claim 1 is amended to include the subject matter of allowable claim 3. Claims 4-8 are amended to depend from claim 1. Allowable claims 10, 12, and 13 are amended into independent format. Independent claim 17 is amended to include the limitations of allowable claim 19. Claims 20-22 are amended to depend from claim 17. Claim 20 is also amended to replace "snap" with "ring," thereby providing proper antecedent basis. Allowable claims 23, 26, and 27 are also amended into independent format.

Applicants cancel claims 2-3, 9, 11, 18-19, 25, and 31.

No new matter is added.

Rejection Pursuant to 35 U.S.C. § 112

The Examiner rejects dependent claim 20 pursuant to 35 U.S.C. §112 as being indefinite for failing to particularly point and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention. Claim 20 has been amended to provide sufficient antecedent basis for the limitation "the snap ring," thereby obviating the basis for this rejection.

Rejections Pursuant to 35 U.S.C. § 102(b)

The Examiner rejects claims 1, 2, 6, 11, 17, 18, 22, and 25 pursuant to 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,443,467 of Biedermann et al ("Biedermann '467"). The Examiner also rejects dependent claims 7 and 8 pursuant to 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,669,911 of Errico et al., and dependent claim 9 pursuant to 35

U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,672,176 of Biedermann et al. ("Biedermann '176").

While Applicants disagree with the Examiner's rejections, in order to expedite prosecution Applicants have amended independent claims 1 and 17 to include subject matter from allowable claims 3 and 19, respectively. This amendment is believed to obviate the basis for this rejection.

This amendment should not be taken to mean that Applicants agree with the Examiner's rejections. Applicants reserve the right to pursue the original claims in a continuation application.

Rejection Pursuant to 35 U.S.C. § 103(a)

The Examiner rejects claim 31 pursuant to 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over Biedermann '467 in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,964,760 of Richelsoph. While Applicants disagree with this rejection, claim 31 is cancelled thereby obviating the basis for this rejection.

Conclusion

In view of the amendments and remarks above, Applicants submit that all pending claims are in condition for allowance, and allowance thereof is respectfully requested. Applicants encourage the Examiner to telephone the undersigned in the event that such communication might expedite prosecution of this matter.

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa J. Michaud, Reg. No. 44,238
Attorney for Applicants

NUTTER, McCLENNEN & FISH, LLP
World Trade Center West
155 Seaport Boulevard
Boston, MA 02210
Tel: (617) 439-2550
Fax: (617) 310-9550